

THE WHITE SLAVES OF ENGLAND

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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BY ROBERT
H. SHERARD





The White Stars of England

DONE TO DEATH.
Elizabeth Ryan dead in the Newcastle Workhouse.

[Frontispiece]

THE WHITE SLAVES OF ENGLAND

BEING TRUE PICTURES OF CERTAIN SOCIAL
CONDITIONS IN THE KINGDOM
OF ENGLAND IN THE
YEAR 1897



BY
ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD

AUTHOR OF "JACOB NIEMAND" "THE
MOCKING-BIRD" ETC

ILLUSTRATED BY
HAROLD PIFFARD

"Zwischen dem Ambos
und Hammer"
—Goethe

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1897

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Un long cri d'indignation retentit en ce moment en Europe à la suite des révélations faites par M. Sherard.

L'Intransigeant (Paris)

January 4, 1897

TRANSLATION

A long cry of indignation is echoing to-day through Europe, in consequence of the revelations made by Mr. Sherard.

L'Intransigeant (Paris)

TO MY FRIEND,
THE REV. HERBERT BENTLEY FREEMAN,
SENIOR CURATE OF ST. ANNE'S, SOHO,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.

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Preface

IT is my duty—a pleasant duty—in republishing these articles descriptive of the horrible slavery to which so many thousands of our country men and women are subjected, to express in the foremost place my obligation to Mr. C. Arthur Pearson, in whose magazine these life-stories appeared last year.

It was thanks to his enterprise and unstinted liberality that I was able to carry out my investigations as fully as the gravity of the subject demanded ; it was thanks to his courage that a first hearing by millions of people all over the world was obtained for the very serious charges which in these papers are brought against the English industrial system.

In writing of “ millions of people all over the world,” I do not over-rate. *Pearson's Magazine* goes to the four corners of the

earth, and on one and the same day I received a Japanese newspaper from Japan and an English newspaper from Jamaica containing long extracts from these articles. They have been quoted in every country of Europe, and in every State in America; they have formed the subject of sermons from the pulpit and of lectures from the platform.

In saying this, let me not be suspected of self-complacency nor accused of self-flattery. I have but little share in the triumph of arousing this universal interest. These are life-stories told in their own language by unhappy men and women. I was but the scrivener who took these stories down, and thus any one of Mr. Pearson's printers who helped in putting them into type deserves as much credit as myself.

To Mr. Pearson, on the other hand, all credit is due. Sympathetic from the first to our poor friends, he boldly faced the odium which might have been aroused against him in the "classes" by lending his magazine to the purposes of these arraignments. His was the risk, his was the courage, and his should be the honour.

For my part, I attribute this universal interest to the universal desire for knowledge of the truth about contemporary social conditions. The great success which has attended on M. Zola or Mr. Arthur Morrison, as novelists, and on Mr. Robert Blatchford, amongst others, as chroniclers, is due, without any doubt, to the fact that all these writers, realists of fiction or of fact, are known to speak the truth. And I believe that all those who told me their dismal stories, as set forth in these pages, men, women, and children, did also speak the truth. "We ums no interest to tell you no lies" was said to me over and over again by haggard witnesses, in the course of my long cross-examinations. Nor had they. I have been told by employers since these articles have been published that the men have been "kidding me" or "getting at me," resenting the interference of a stranger in their affairs. I am very sure that this is not so. One has eyes to see as well as ears to hear, and no secondary evidence was put into the world which direct evidence had not confirmed. And as to being "kidded," I do not think I

lack in experience. I wanted the truth, for the truth alone was of value to me; the lie must defeat itself. Indeed, to the credit of all the workers whom I examined, I will say that I only remember one instance where deliberate "getting at" was attempted. This was done by a chainmaker at Cradley Heath, with whom I wasted the best part of a day, and who, indeed, "kidded" me merrily. He told me that the highest wages a male chainmaker could earn were 20s. a week, and so on. But his lies were anæmic and short-lived. I turned his depositions into pipe-spills, and consigned his words to temporary oblivion.

It has also been advanced that as in each case I put myself under the guidance of the secretary of the local trades union, and was by him introduced to the persons who told me their pitiful stories, my witnesses were naturally the most miserable members of each trade, non-representative, in a word, so that I have only shown the worst side of the question. This is not so. The various secretaries, to whose kindness I owe so much, all expressed the

hope and wish that I should write in a fair and impartial spirit, for they knew, as I knew, that untruth or exaggeration would but injure the cause which we had so much at heart. In each case, I noticed a wish that justice should be done, and, indeed, where any extenuating circumstance could be adduced, it was put forward with extreme alacrity. I remember with what satisfaction Mr. Samuel Shaftoe, J.P., Secretary of the Woolcombers' Association, informed me, in answer to my question whether to his knowledge any of the miserably underpaid slaves of Bradford had been able to put by any money out of their scanty and irregular wages as a provision against sickness, or for old age, that he knew of a couple—man and wife—who had saved up the sum of £60. And he rubbed his hands and I rubbed mine.

Moreover, it was not to the secretaries of unions nor to union men alone that I addressed myself. Indeed, I saw more non-Unionists, and this for the simple reason that in these particular trades it is but the minority which dares thus syndicate itself.

These are trades in which capital is all-powerful, tyrannical, indeed, in which the supply of flesh and bone largely exceeds the demand; in which haggard men and women and children fight for the privilege of joining in a sordid dance of death, so that but the few dare assert any other rights than to feed and work and rot and die, lest the masters take offence, and the crust be withheld. For the crust is sweet, albeit poison-laden, and these people cling to dear life with a tenacity which is the philosopher's admiration. It was Dostoïevski, was it not, who said that the instinct for living is so great in the human race that a man would prefer life to death even though this life had to be passed standing on a rock in mid-ocean, the head alone above the water. And, in despite of pain and sickness and the terrible fardel of moral degradation which these helots have to bear, in despite of the chilling hopelessness of the immediate future, in despite of the certainty of an ugly and premature death, life is dearer to these poor men and women than ever it is to the scented coxcombs of our promenades. And so it is that but the

few dare to do anything that may bring a frown on to the master's narrow brow, that may jeopardize the insufficient loaf, that may starve, indeed, those who have only been hungry all their lives.

“None of Healey's men need apply” was an edict recently given forth in Widnes and St. Helens. Patrick Healey is the secretary of the Chemical Workers' Union in these two towns, the adherents to which, as stated, were boycotted on this occasion, as on many others.¹ It is the same everywhere, and the result, as I have said, is that it is but the few who dare to combine for the protection of their rights. Rights! poor fellows!

So I saw non-Union men as well as Union men. It was the same story with those as with these.

In the prefatory note which preceded the articles in *Pearson's Magazine*, and which is

¹ Since writing these lines I have heard that, as a result of this boycotting, The Chemical Workers' Union has been broken up, the club houses at St. Helens and Widnes have been closed, and the furniture in these sold by auction. Thus the last little defence that these poor fellows had against their masters has been destroyed. God help them.

printed in this book also, I describe the manner in which I worked. A few further particulars may be of interest. Before giving these, however, I have a further disclaimer to make. I know very well—as well as those who have pointed the circumstance out to me—that in this matter of the White Slaves of England I am no discoverer; that all these things have been described before again and again, notably in a splendid series of articles which appeared in 1892 in the *Daily Chronicle*, entitled “Danger in the Workshop,” and that even the title has been used over and over again. I knew this when I undertook the work. I know it now. But these are matters where silence is felony, of which the evil must be ever and ever shouted from the house-tops till not a man or woman in the British Isles can plead ignorance as an excuse for indifference of the abominations in our midst which should make one ashamed of the name of Englishman.¹ Till now, little,

¹ Writes David Christie Murray, in the preface to his striking novel, “A Capful o’ Nails,” which deals with the Nailmakers: “Much is amended now-a-days,

if anything, has been done for all the masterly exposures of these iniquities. Parliamentary Commissions have been held, a special enquiry has been made on behalf of the Home Office, and the state of these people is worse than ever it was. I can think only of one particular reform which is to result from these Commissions, and that is that after June of this year it will be illegal to employ women in the white lead factories. This is an excellent reform, as all those will agree who read in the pages devoted to the white lead industry of the martyrdom of Elizabeth Ryan, aged nineteen, and late of 23, Silver Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, a single example of many martyrdoms.¹ But that is all, whilst, *per contra*, in the matter of wages and imposition of tasks, everywhere things are growing worse and worse. Should women be allowed to but the truth even to-day is stern and mournful, and may well make an Englishman ashamed."

¹ A few weeks after I had left Newcastle-on-Tyne, Mr. Innes, of the *Newcastle Leader*, kindly sent me the report of an inquest held on another young woman, who had died under circumstances identical with those of the death of poor Elizabeth.

do blacksmiths' work, and at a starvation wage? Imagine a woman, within a few hours, nay, minutes, of becoming a mother, working the treadle of the heavy hammer, impeded by the disfigurement of her approaching maternity, yet fighting against all physical disabilities for a few more farthings.¹ So whilst these things continue to be, so long must the cry of reprobation be raised, till every corner in the land echoes with the shout of "Shame!"

As I explain in the prefatory note which follows this preface, I did not, on a single occasion, apply to any master for permission to enter the jealously-guarded workshops. I thought it would be an act of *lèse-hospitality* to accept a favour and afterwards to criticise and attack, if occasion arose, as I anticipated it would arise. My entire time was spent with the workpeople, of whom I can say that people more hospitable and kindly I have never met. They had little or no interest in my work; experience has made fatalists

¹ I say farthings deliberately. The wages of these blacksmith women must be calculated not by pence, but by farthings per hour.

of them all; they have forgotten how to hope; of all these stirs and alarms nothing has ever come, and they expect nothing but the "grubber," struggling on with a resignation and courage which are little less than sublime. As an alleged would-be exposé of their wrongs, I was to them but another sleek humbug in a frock coat and a tall hat, with private ends to gain, for whom they cared nothing, of whom they wanted nothing; but as a man who evidently sympathized with them, and respected them, as I did respect them, whose work is so much finer because so much more manly, so much more courageous than this unmanly trade of writing, they took me to their loyal hearts, and held out their grimy hands and passed the mug of beer.

An instance of their hospitality. In one town I found myself one night likely to be homeless. It was a small town, and the only possible hotel there closed at eleven o'clock, after which hour admittance was given to none. I had arrived late in the afternoon—it was my second visit—and had gone straight to the workmen's club, where

I had spent the whole evening in conversation with the members. Our meeting broke up at midnight, and I made my way at once to the hotel, accompanied by a couple of the workmen, who had warned me that I should ring at the door in vain. And so it was, so that at half-past twelve I found myself in the street, a homeless man. Here was a good opportunity, I thought, to see this town by night, or rather, I should say, to smell it by night; for the fact had been vouchsafed to me that the factories there used to let off their foul and noxious gases in the early hours of the morning, when all the folk were asleep, thus evading certain pains and penalties edicted by Government for contravening stringent regulations. The prospect of such a *nuit blanche* was not a pleasing one, even to one accustomed to late-walking, and in quest of experiences; but as I wanted to see, hear, and even smell all things for myself, I should have faced it, had the weather not suddenly changed and come on to rain heavily. Then I saw the two workmen in whispered confabulation. At last one approached me and said: "Gaffer, thou canst

not stay out the night. Thou shalt come home with me." I remonstrated, but in the end accepted his hospitality. We walked a long way, but his cottage was at last reached, a four-roomed hovel, for which he paid five shillings a week, work and wages or no work and no wages. He left me in the kitchen, with a "Bide a bit, gaffer," and darted upstairs. Presently I heard him cry, "Get up lass, and out of that. There's a gentleman going to sleep here to-night." It suddenly dawned upon me that there was but one bed in this poor house, and that my host was turning his wife out of it, to make room for his guest. I called him down and told him that on no consideration was he to disturb Madame, and when he insisted, I prepared to leave the house. At last he gave in, and I made myself comfortable on three chairs. In the morning, when I awoke, I found breakfast on the table, round which my host and hostess and four bonny children were sitting. We had bread without butter and tea without milk. I remained in that cottage the best part of the day, and talked the whole time with the woman of the house,

the children and the neighbours, who, in spite of explanations, persisted in taking me for the man in possession. It was a day of poignant interest, in the insight it gave me into all the mean miseries of the very poor. I heard about the landlord's tyrannies, the rapacity of the credit-giving and usurious tradesmen, of the terrible difficulties which the good lady of the house had to face, with six mouths to feed out of scanty and irregular wages.

I could mention many similar instances of kindly hospitality; indeed, I may say that there was but one occasion, and one occasion only, on which I was treated with rudeness, and this was at Bradford, where a drunken woolcomber would have it that I was "a ——— bum-bailiff," and offered personal violence. He was promptly challenged to fight by every other man in the pot-house, and it might have gone ill with him, had not the barman helped him out into the street.

I must say that I liked my life amongst these people, for all that every waking hour was fraught with some fresh experience of suffering. They are such good people, or, I

should say, they are people with such excellent dispositions to be good, if only circumstances would let them be. They are cheerful—they to whom everything that gladdens life is wanting. They will laugh heartily—or it may be only hysterically—over the humorous aspects of their condition, for there is always something grotesque in extreme wretchedness. I shall not forget how the men at the Chemical Workers' Club in Widnes roared at the joke about the donkey, asphyxiated by Roger, or chlorine gas, who died manfully; and the one about a chemical worker having to pay a man five shillings to masticate his food for him. This last joke tickled them specially, and they grinned with their black gums. For hardly a man amongst them had saved his teeth from destruction—one of the perquisites of work in the chemical yards. I cannot say how I envied them their characters, how I admired them, how I respected them. The Girondins singing on their way to the scaffold showed not more heroism than these people do every day of their lives. A week spent in their company should cure the most confirmed

pessimist. When men and women can keep up heart under conditions so terrible, who has a right to despair? Who has a right to vilify human nature, which in these people manifests itself so admirable, so heroic? I would like to take Dr. Ibsen and a few of his acolytes into some of the cottages and the workshops which I visited. It would give them a better opinion of humanity.

I think that I can give the record case of cheerfulness under adversity. In one workhouse I was introduced to an old workman named Peter. He was in bed, and looked very ill. But he laughed and rubbed his hands when asked how he was, and said, "It's coming off next week. Then I'll be all right." My companion, one of the guardians, said, "That's right, Peter." As we walked away he said to me: "The poor fellow was speaking of his leg. He was a worker in ——'s factory, and got blood-poisoning. One leg was amputated about six weeks ago. The remaining one is now quite gone; it's like black marble. The man is booked; he could not stand another operation, but to comfort him the doctors tell him

that they will amputate it. You saw how pleased he was." The prospect of some diminution of his sufferings made this man laugh and rub his hands. When I reached the end of the ward, I turned round to take a last look at the poor old fellow, whose philosophy seemed to me so much finer, so much more laudable than all the thankless railings of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and the rest. And speaking of Ibsen reminds me of a remark I made to a woman in Cradley Heath, who was forging chain-harrows at three-farthings an hour: "I wish I could have put Hedda Gabler in your place for a month or two. It would have taken the nonsense out of her." This woman had six children and a drunken husband to keep, and worked fourteen hours a day for a weekly wage of six shillings. After two months of this work and this life, Fru Gabler would have returned to Christiania to laugh at her petty troubles, and we should never have had to hear the pistol-shot which throws the foolish into such contemptible ecstasies of emotion.

No doubt in these poor people the animal—

what Zola calls *la bête humaine*—is predominant, but for that who is to blame? Not they themselves in truth. There is no pleasure in their lives, as in the following pages is so often set forth in their own words; they have no time for relaxation; when in work and when out of work—playing!—their entire energy is taken up in the hunting of the loaf. Living lives far worse than the lives of domestic animals, how can it be a matter for wonder that in them the animal prevails? “We ums making childer whilst we’s making chains,” said a chain-woman to me, who added that her husband’s embraces were the only joys that reconciled her to life. And then there’s the drink. Smug correspondents have pointed out to me that by my own statement I interviewed most of the people, whose words are quoted in these articles, in public-houses, that people who frequent public-houses are naturally in difficulties, and do not merit any sympathy. Where else was I to see them? At my hotel? The innkeeper would have refused admittance to such draggled tatterdemalions. In their own houses? Well, where it was possible I did

so visit them, but often it was inconvenient for them—for various reasons which I could easily guess—to receive me there. In one of the fashionable clubs in the town perhaps? *Va-t'en voir s'ils viennent, Jean.* I had the choice between the public-house and the street, and preferred the former.

As to the drinking of these people, I admit that they aggravate their position by this indulgence. But you cannot degrade a man beneath the level of brute beasts, as these men and women are degraded, and then expect of them restraint or self-respect. And further, it should be remembered that all these classes of work are so exhausting, so thirst-provoking, that the men must drink. Well, let them drink barley-water, or oat-meal-water, say you. A man who, by the nature of his work, is unable to eat anything, or to retain anything,¹ must keep his energies alive with stimulants. It is deplorable, it is fatal, but it is so. Let Chadband, instead of deploring effect—drunkenness—rather join us in deploring causes—degradation and

¹ See the doctor's remarks in the article on "The Chemical Workers."

unnatural conditions of life. Let the temperance reformers legislate against the things which make for drunkenness, and do away with factories where, as Dr. Bellew of St. Helens said, "the men cannot work unless they are half-drunk."¹ For it is indeed rather on account of the physical exigencies of their work than because of the feeling of moral degradation that these people, as a class, exceed and are intemperate. Look at the nail-makers of Bromsgrove, who are the worst paid of all the white slaves. I never heard of a single instance of a man's "going on the beer" during all the days I spent in that picturesque but wicked little town. But then their work is not done in great heat; they do not stream with perspiration as they wield their hammers, and can eat and enjoy such miserable provender—one can hardly call it food—as they can afford out of their pitiful wages. And the same may be said of the slipper-makers. None of these people wish to drink; they drink because they cannot help themselves. They go as fatally to intemperance as Tess went

¹ See chapter on "The Chemical Workers."

to the gallows, under the whip of circumstance. As to the nail-makers in particular, they are no doubt in part also restrained by their sincere piety. This I describe in the chapter devoted to their mournful lives. One might search the British Isles from end to end, no truer Christians could be found than these poor men and women, whose hopes are not of this world, who derive courage and draw contentment from the promise of the hereafter. In their simplicity, in their faith and trust, they are as the little children to whom the Kingdom of Heaven was promised.

The exploration of the factories was an easy task. One had often but to walk confidently in at the front door with firm steps and a brazen forehead. Where this was impracticable there was the wall at the back. And there were other ways and means, which need not be detailed, lest helpful friends be molested. Mr. Piffard, the artist, who accompanied me, in every case applied to the masters for permission to visit the works. He could do this without *l'ese-hospitality*, for his drawings were to be from nature, exact

reproductions of things seen. In every case but one this permission was granted. The exception was at Widnes, where, at the office of the United Alkali Company, he was told that strangers could not be allowed to visit any of the works on any pretext whatever. So on this occasion he was forced to follow my example, and get over the wall at the back, or we should have had to do without his admirable pictures of the chemical workers. Of these pictures, I wish to say this, that in all the criticisms I have read of the articles exception has been taken to one only, and that is the picture illustrating a female woolcomber, who, suffering from the intense heat, has stripped herself to the waist.

Said Mr. Whitehead, of the Bradford Chamber of Commerce:¹ "As to the women workers, the statements with reference to them were not correct, and many of the women were very much annoyed at the sketch which was published with the article. He (Mr. Whitehead) had never heard of anything of the sort in the trade before, and it

¹ See Appendix. Report of Meeting of Bradford Chamber of Commerce.

was certainly not done at any of the large establishments." The picture was, no doubt, as true a reproduction of a thing seen as are all Mr. Piffard's drawings, of which I can only say that they do not perhaps illustrate the very worst aspects of these lives. Would the Bradford woolcombers (masters) have preferred our giving a picture of the scene where a girl fell down on the floor of a combing shed in the pains of labour, prematurely brought on by exhaustion?¹

As to criticism, I am happy to say that on no single point of any importance have I received contradiction. The Widnes people were very indignant at my statements about the vegetation in and around their town, and some correspondents endeavoured to crush me under fine cabbages and trees in pots, which, living contradiction of my statements, were to be seen by all who had eyes to see. And that is about all. The newspapers in the towns which I have visited have almost all written favourably about my articles.

¹ This took place shortly before our visit to Bradford. The girl was taken home in a cab, but was delivered of a child on the way.

“It makes one shudder to read of the horrors suffered by these lead-workers,” says the *Newcastle Leader*, which, had I exaggerated or misrepresented facts, would surely have been the first to point this out. And this is but one instance out of scores. For the rest, those who wish to read what contradictions have been made will find them in the appendix to this volume, where I have printed what seemed to me worthy of notice, however erroneous and unfounded I may know these contradictions to be. Now and again some bluster about proceedings in libel has been made, but to my intense disappointment nothing has ever come of this talk. I could wish for nothing better than to put into the witness-box a dozen ragged, starveling men and women to swear to the truth of every word I have written. It would cause some sensation in the law courts, and would serve our ends better than very many writings.¹

Many people have said, commenting on

¹ Since the above was written I have myself been forced to take action against one newspaper which described me as “a liar, a base slanderer, and a sensation-mongering traducer.”

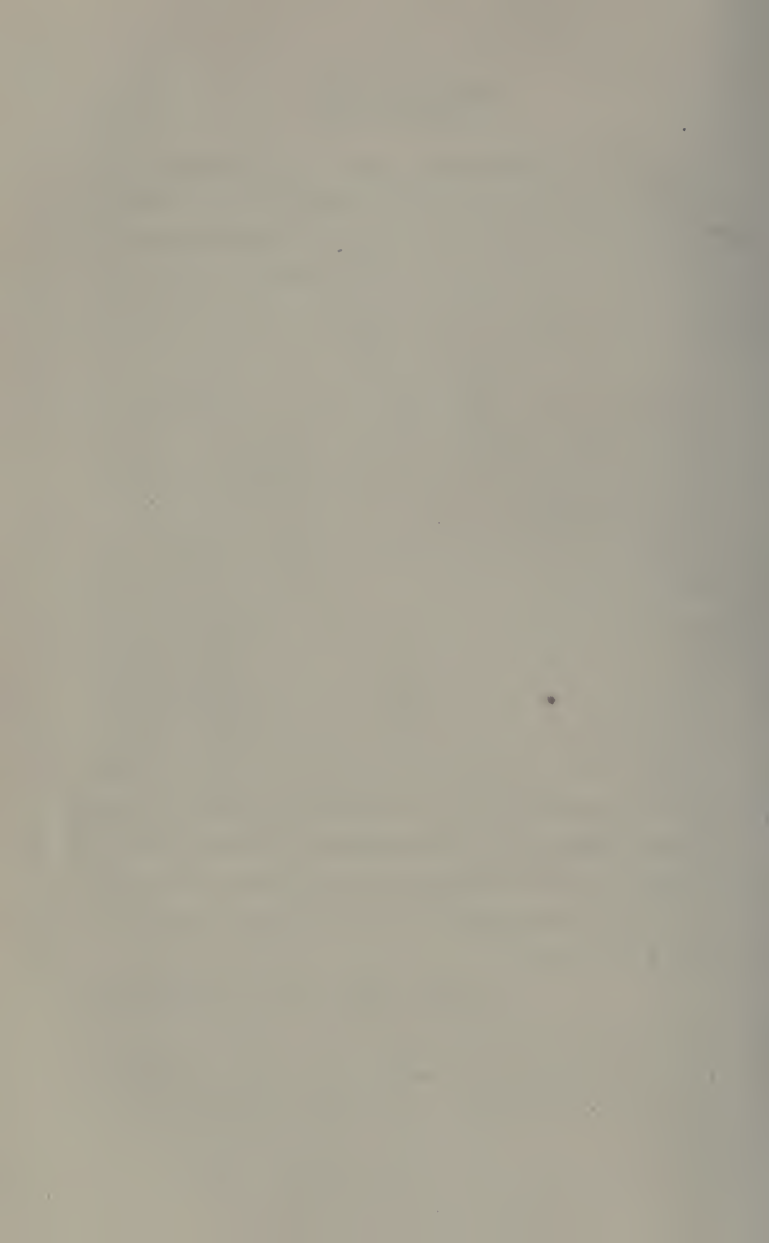
what is written about women, that these are amply protected by the Factory Acts. "Oh, are they?" has been my invariable answer. If there is one Act of Parliament in existence through which it is easy to drive a coach-and-four it is the Factory Act. How, for instance, does it protect women—nailmakers, chainmakers, tailoresses, and so on—who work, not in factories, but in premises rented by themselves?

This misuser of women and children, indeed, is what is most revolting in all this mournful story. Could not something be done in this year of grace, in which the British Empire is preparing to celebrate the long life and glorious reign of a Sovereign Lady—Queen and Woman—to honour womanhood by rescuing from such nameless misery and degradation the thousands of that Lady's subjects, the thousands of women and girls who are oppressed because—being women—they are weak?

ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD.

AUTHORS' CLUB,
3, WHITEHALL COURT, LONDON, S.W.

February 15th, 1897.



Original Preface

THE collection of material for this series of articles on the worst paid and most murderous trades of England occupied me for nearly two months in the spring of last year. During this period I visited six manufacturing centres in the Northern and Midland counties of England, spending about ten days in each district.

My time was passed almost entirely in the society of the workmen, at their clubs, in the public-houses which some frequent, in the workhouses to which nearly all come, in the hospitals, and in the workshops, which are the ante-rooms of the hospital and the workhouse.

I visited their cottages and conversed on questions of domestic economy with their

wives, learning from the lips of these by what prodigies of management they could contrive to feed, clothe, and house their children, their husbands, and themselves, out of the irregular pittances which these deathly trades afford to the workers, comparing everywhere the statements of these and those, in an ardent quest of truth.

I visited the doctors in each town, and examined the books from which the *ægotats* are delivered, as well as—kindest books for any who love the class to read—those in which the certificates of death stand copied.

On some occasions, just as the visitor to Dartmoor tastes the prison fare, I accepted their spontaneous offers of hospitality, taking “soops of yale” out of the common mug of the woolcombers of Bradford, or sharing in a solitary bowl of milkless tea with the “blue-bed women” of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

I avoided contact with the masters as far as possible, and am in no way indebted to

any of them for assistance in my enterprise. The factories I visited were visited by me as a trespasser, and at a trespasser's risk. That, in conversations with employers in luxurious smoking-rooms, these should laugh at the stories of grievances which I related, is in the natural order of things.

Mr. Harold Piffard, the artist, who accompanied me, being in no way responsible for the things I was to set down, or for my manner of setting them down, worked on a different line. He visited the factories by the front door, where I had to climb over the wall at the back.

R. H. SHERARD.

VI

The Chainmakers of Cradley
Heath

VI

The Chainmakers of Cradley Heath

IF the condition of the iron-workers in Cradley Heath is even worse than that of the nailmakers of Bromsgrove, it may at least be said of Cradley Heath, that it makes no pretence to the rustic beauty with which Bromsgrove hides its cruelty as with a mask. It is frankly an industrial town, a town of the Black Country, where, in smoke and soot and mud, men and women earn their bread with the abundant sweat not of their brows alone; a terribly ugly and depressing town, in which, however, contrasts too painful are absent.

One expects to find misery here, whereas in Bromsgrove one looked for smiles.

The main industry of Cradley Heath is

chain-making, and it may be remarked here that this industry has never been so prosperous, at least in respect of the amount of chain produced and the number of workmen employed. It appears that each week there are manufactured in the Cradley Heath district 1000 tons of chain. The chains are of every variety, from the huge 4 in. mooring cables down to No. 16 on the wire gauge, and include rigging-chains, crane-cables, mining-cables, cart and plough traces, curbs, halters, cow-ties, dog-chains, and even handcuff-links.

If chains for slaves are not made here also it is doubtless because there are no slaves in England; or it may be because hunger can bind tighter than any iron links. And chronic hunger is the experience of most of the women-workers in Cradley Heath, as any one can learn who cares to converse with them.

"We has to do with two quartern loaves a day," said one of the woman-blacksmiths to me, "though three such loaves wouldn't be too much for us." This woman had six children to keep and her husband into the



A GROUP OF CRADLEY HEATH CHAINMAKERS.

bargain, for he had been out of work since Christmas. She was good enough to detail to me her manner of living. A pennyworth of bits of bacon, twopennyworth of meat from the "chep-butcher," and a pennyworth of potatoes, all cooked together, made a dinner for the family of eight.

But such a dinner was very rarely to be obtained; most often she had to beg dripping "off them as belongs to me," as a relish to the insufficient bread. It appeared that she had influential relations, who could spare a cupful of dripping now and again, and who sometimes passed on some "bits" of cast-off clothing. She showed me that she was wearing a pair of men's high-low boots, which had come to her in this way.

She "never sees no milk," and in the matter of milk, her children, even the youngest, had "to do the same as we." These children, like all other children in the Cradley Heath district, had been weaned on to "sop." Sop is a preparation of bread and hot water, flavoured with the drippings

of the tea-pot. This *plat* is much esteemed by the children, and the woman said: "If them's got a basin of sop, them's as proud as if them'd got a beefsteak."

In good weeks she could get a bit of margarine, and each week she bought a quarter of a pound of tea at one shilling the pound, and four pounds of sugar at a penny halfpenny. As to eggs, she said: "By gum, I'd like one for my tea; I haven't had a egg for years."¹ For clothes for her children

¹ NOTE.—On returning to Ambleside, where I was then living, I sent this poor woman a basket of eggs. In acknowledgment, a lady resident in Cradley Heath wrote: "Mrs. D — has asked me if I would write a few lines for her to you, and having done so, I thought I would add a little from myself, as I am sure you will pardon me for writing to you, though you are an entire stranger to me. I have known Mrs. D — for nearly ten years, and have found her to be a thoroughly honest and would be a respectable woman, as she comes from a respectable family. But what with bad trade she was nearly brought to starvation some time ago. But I felt as if I could not do enough for her. I am very fond of her, as she is a truthful woman, and I try as often as I can to help her. My father, and some more of the citizens of this dilapidated town, got up a Relief Committee, and we started a Bread and Tea Fund for the winter months. You



"IT APPEARED THAT SHE HAD INFLUENTIAL RELATIONS, WHO COULD SPARE A CUPFUL OF DRIPPING NOW AND AGAIN, AND WHO SOMETIMES PASSED ON SOME 'BITS' OF CLOTHING. SHE SHOWED ME THAT SHE WAS WEARING A PAIR OF MEN'S HIGH-LOW BOOTS, WHICH HAD COME TO HER IN THIS WAY."

(See page 211.)

and herself, she depended entirely on charity. None of her family had more “nor he stood up in,” and when her children’s stockings wanted washing, she had to put them to bed, for none of them “had more than one bit to his feet.” The washing was usually done on Saturday evenings, when she had finished her work.

This work consisted in making heavy chain at 5s. 4d. the cwt. By working incessantly for about twelve hours a day, she could make about one cwt. and a half in a week. Her hands were badly blistered, and she was

would have stared had you seen her children eating the eggs which you sent; as we say in Scotland, it would do ‘sair een guid’ to have seen them at their tea.” Mrs D——’s message ran—“I beg to thank you for box of eggs, which came to hand quite safely, and which myself and husband and children thoroughly enjoyed. It was quite a treat for us to have such a thing in our house. The young lady who is writing this letter for me knows how hard I have had to work to make an honest living. There is eight of us in the family, and only my second son, a boy of thirteen years of age, getting 4s. a week for blowing in a chainmaker’s shop, and myself, who makes chain; and after working hard from 7 a.m. till 9 p.m., from Monday till dinner time on Saturday, and receive 6s.”—R. H. S.

burnt in different parts of the body by the flying sparks. In spite of things, she was a well-set, jovial woman, not without a rude beauty, which she explained thus :

“It’s not what I gets to eat. It’s me having a contented mind, and not letting nothing trouble me.”

And she asked me to compare her with a woman who sat next to her, and who was lamentably thin and worn.

“Look at my sister,” she said, “who worrits herself.” Some money was given to this woman, and she departed joyfully to pay some little debts. “If there’s anything over,” she said, “I’ll get a booster to-night.” I learnt that a “booster” was a quartern loaf.¹

This conversation took place in the “Manchester Arms,” which is the house of call of the chainmakers, both male and

¹ At the time when, in the beginning of the winter of last year, the price of bread rose, I felt very anxious for Mrs. D—— and her seven dependents, and wrote to ask how this rise affected her. She answered that prices for chain having slightly improved, she was fortunately able to provide the same amount of bread, *i.e.*, two-thirds of a sufficiency.

female. Beer plays a great part in the lives of the men, and even amongst the women a predilection for drink may be observed. The number of quarts of "three-penny," or even "twopenny," consumed by the men in the chain factories is very great. A master told me that some of his men must have a sponge beneath their belts, as they often consume three shillings-worth of beer a day at threepence the quart.

The beer chiefly drunk in Cradley is a variety known as Burton Returns, that is to say, beer which has been returned to the brewers as undrinkable by customers more fastidious than the chainmakers. A boy is attached to each factory, whose exclusive service is to run out and fetch pints for the men.

The heat of the furnaces is terrible, and the work most exhausting. Men have to wring their clothes when they go home. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that they should drink such quantities; and as to their preference for alcoholic beverages, a man said to me :

“What strength is there behind six or seven quarts of water?” Some men, he admitted, seemed to manage on “seconds,” or milk which had been “hanging about the dairy for some days.”

It was somewhat of a surprise to hear that the men could afford to spend three shillings a day on drink when at work, because it is generally understood that chainmaking is of all industries, perhaps, the worse paid, as it is certainly the most exhausting. The master, however, stated that some of his men could make as much as 10s. in one day. And this investigation proved to be the case. A skilled worker can make 10s. in one day, less the usual charges, but the work is so exhausting that, having worked the number of links needful to earn that sum, he would be so fatigued that he would have “to play” for the next two or three days. Indeed, a man who told me that he could never earn more than 20s. in a week, on which he had to keep his wife and six children, added that often when he had completed a week’s labour he was so knocked up that he was forced to “mess about” for three or four days.

The work is unhealthy and dangerous. One sees few old men in Cradley. Lung disease carries the men off at an early age.

"The work affects you all over," said a worker to me. "When you've done a good turn, you feel like buried. You gets so cold that you shivers so you can't hold your food. The furnaces burn your insides right out of you, and a man what's got no inside is soon settled off."

This man had burns all over his body. "It's easier," he explained, "to catch a flea than a piece of red hot iron, and the bits of red hot iron are always flying about. Sometimes a bit gets into your boot, and puts you on 'the box' for a week." But the risk of catching cold is most dreaded, for a cold may kill a man. This worker told me of a friend of his who had walked over to Clent Hill one day, got wet, and was dead the next evening. He had also a dismal story to tell of a man who had died of clamming. The doctor had said "his inside had gone from starvation." This was a "middle-handed" chainmaker (a man of middling skill), but he had got too weak to work.

Work in Cradley is done for the most part in factories, or at least in sheds where several work together. One does not see many solitary workers here as in Bromsgrove, and perhaps on this account the wretchedness of the chainmakers is not so immediately apparent, for there is a sense of comfort in gregariousness.

One may come across sheds with five or six women, each working at her anvil ; they are all talking above the din of their hammers and the clanking of their chains, or they may be singing a discordant chorus ; and at first, the sight of this sociability makes one overlook the misery, which, however, is only too visible, be it in the foul rags and preposterous boots that the women wear, or in their haggard faces and the faces of the wizened infants hanging to their mothers' breasts, as these ply the hammer, or sprawling in the mire on the floor, amidst the showers of fiery sparks.

Here and there in Cradley, it is true, one may come across such scenes as sadden in Bromsgrove : some woman plying her task in a cell-like shed, silent, absorbed,



"A WOMAN PLYING HER TASK IN A CELL-LIKE SHED,
SILENT, ABSORBED, AND ALONE."

alone. One such a sight I particularly remember.

In a shed, fitted with forge and anvil, there was a woman at work. From a pole which ran across the room there dangled a tiny swing chair for the baby, so that whilst working her hammers, the mother could rock the child. She was working very hard at spike-making, and she told us that the previous week, her husband and herself had converted into spikes a ton of iron. These they had then packed and conveyed to the warehouse. For this ton of spikes they had received 20s., the remuneration of a week's work by the two of them, and out of these 20s. there had to be deducted 3s. 8*d.* for "breeze" (fuel). The rent of the house and shop was 3s. 8*d.*, and damage to the extent of 1s. had been done to the tools. There was consequently left for the housekeeping about 11s.

This woman had five children, and she told me that she had been laughed at by her neighbours, because, in spite of her blacksmith work, she had brought each child safely into the world. The work is such that, in Cradley, Lucina is not to these female Vulcans a kindly goddess. One

woman, also a blacksmith, had been seven times abandoned by her in her hour of need. It may be remarked that so pressing are the wants of the women, that they will work up to within an hour or two of their confinement.

A woman whom I met at the "Manchester Arms" was good enough to give me some particulars of the birth of "our little Johnny." It appears that this young gentleman was born on November 9th of last year.

"I worked up till five that day," said his mother, "and then I give over because I had my cleaning to do. Our little Johnny was born at a quarter past seven."

This woman made chain-harrows, and could earn 5s. a week at it, for twelve hours a day; as to which work Mr. James Smith, the Secretary of the Chainmakers' Union, said, "It's not women's work at all."

Indeed, no part of this work is work for women, and his manhood is ashamed who sees these poor female beings swinging their heavy hammers or working the treadles of

the Oliver. Oliver is here so heavy—sometimes the weight of the hammer exceeds 36lb.—that the rebellious treadle jerks its frail mistress upwards, and a fresh ungainly effort must be hers before she can force it to its work and bring it down. As to Oliver, the name given here also to the heavy hammer which can be worked by a treadle alone, the philologist, remembering the dismantled castle of Dudley hard by, the Roundhead triumphs of the neighbouring Edge Hill, and many another spot in this land, will trace its origin to Cromwell, the heavy-hammer man; Oliver Martel, who crushed kings and castles, princes and prejudice; Oliver the democrat, whose name, by the exquisite irony of things, is now attached to an implement used by slaves most degraded, by starved mothers fighting in sweat and anguish and rags, for the sop of the weazened bairns, who in the shower of fiery sparks grovel in the mire of these shameful workshops.

The impediment of children, to mothers to whom motherhood is here a curse, is nowhere more clearly defined. The wretched

woman, forging link by link the heavy chain, of which she must make 1 cwt. before her weekly rent is paid, is at each moment harassed by her sons and daughters. There is one child at the breast, who hampers the swing of the arm; there is another seated on the forge, who must be watched lest the too comfortable blaze at which it warms its little naked feet, prove 'dangerous, whilst the swarm that cling to her tattered skirt break the instinctive movement of her weary feet.

She cannot absent herself, for as a woman told me, whose child was burned to death in her shed: "the Crowner came down something awful on me for leaving the forge for two minutes to see to summat in the saucepan."

The employing of a nurse to attend to the children seems impossible, according to numerous statements which were made to me. One woman told me that a nurse cost each week 2s. "to do the mother," and 3d. for her pocket "to encourage her like"; and, she added, this expense was not to be borne. She exemplified her statement by

giving me an account of the earnings of the previous three days and the expenditure incurred. She had forged 728 heavy links in the three days, and for this had received 2s. 2d. She had paid 7½d. for firing and 1s. for the nurse. Her net earnings for the 36 hours were 6½d. Her eyes reminded me of Leah, and she said :

“We’m working worse nor slaves, and getting nothing to eat into the bargain.”

Another woman who was with her told me a halfpennyworth of oatmeal often served as a meal for her whole family. This woman’s husband was in a lunatic asylum. “Heat, worry, and drink knocked my old ’un,” she said. He had left her with five children, and to feed these (Mr. James Smith assured me of the truth of this statement) she used often to work from three in the morning till eleven at night, and begin again at three in the morning next day.

The work of chainmaking consists in heating the iron rods (a process which involves a number of pulls on the bellows for each link), bending the red-hot piece, cutting in on the hardy, twisting the link,

inserting it into the last link of the chain, and welding, or closing it, with repeated blows of the hand hammer and the Oliver worked by a treadle. To earn 3s. a woman must "work in" forty-six rods of iron, each nine feet long, and out of these 3s. she must pay for her gleeds, or fuel. This woman had to make 1 cwt. of iron chain to earn 4s.

The women work on the smaller chains, and consequently use smaller rods of iron. For these less heat is necessary than for the iron worked by the men, who make the huge cables. Consequently for the women's forges the bellows which they work themselves suffices. For the men "blast," supplied by mechanical power, is necessary. This power is supplied either by steam or by hand labour. In either case it is paid for by the men, and these complain bitterly of the rapacity of the masters in extorting for "blast" sums the aggregate of which exceeds its cost. I know of one master in Cradley who employs men at sixty forges. Each forge brings him 3s. a week for blast. The total is £9. His "blast" is supplied

by a steam-engine, the fuel for which costs him 30s. a week. He has also to pay 24s. a week to his engineer. His outlay each week is accordingly £2 14s., as against £9 which he receives from his men.

On the other hand this steam-engine drives the guillotine-shears (which cut the thick iron bar into the requisite lengths for the links), the brightening box, in which the chains are polished, and the testing machine, where the strength of the cables is, or more often is not, tested.¹

In the smaller factories manual labour is employed to work the machines by which the forges are supplied with blast, and here also the master extorts an unjustifiable profit. I remember seeing a woman thus supplying "blast" to four forges. She was a pitiful being, chlorotic, with hair almost

¹ Quantities of cables are exported from Cradley with bogus certificates of strength. These cables give way under the strain which they are certified to resist; ships and lives are lost, and the English chainmaking industry becomes discredited abroad. Custom falls off as a natural consequence, and the men have to suffer for the dishonesty of the masters. I have received several letters on this subject. One gentleman writes

white, and a stamp of imbecility—too easily comprehended—on her ravaged and anæmic face. Her work lasted twelve hours a day, and during the whole of this time she had to turn the handle of a wheel which actuated the bellows of four forges. Each worker paid 3s. a week to the master for blast, whilst the anæmic Albino received for her squirrel slavery, “when things were good,” the wages of 6s. a week.

from London:—“I am a buyer for one of the large South African Export Houses, and although I was not previously ignorant of many of the facts you state, they came to me with fresh interest, as I have strong reasons for suspecting that a certain firm from whom I have been buying tested chain have been sending me false certificates. I want to get to the bottom of this matter, and it occurred to me that if you would be so kind as to put me into communication with Mr. James Smith he might be able to give me some information. I presume he would be glad to do this in the interests of the class he represents, who ultimately suffer by such practices. Further, if he cared to give me a list of the Cradley and Old Hill firms who are known to be sweaters, I should be pleased to avoid them as far as I could, consistent with the interests of my colonial correspondents.” I was sorry, in view of the existing libel laws, not to be able to oblige this correspondent and others who wrote to the same effect.

Elsewhere I saw single bellows worked—at 3*d.* a day to the worker, and 6*d.* to the employer—by very old men and women or by little boys and girls. A particular and



“HER WORK LASTED TWELVE HOURS A DAY, AND DURING THE WHOLE OF THIS TIME SHE HAD TO TURN THE HANDLE OF A WHEEL WHICH ACTUATED THE BELLWS OF FOUR FORGES.”

pitiful sight was that of a sweet little lass—such as Sir John Millais would have liked to paint—dancing on a pair of bellows for 3*d.* a day to supply “blast” to the chain-



"A PARTICULAR AND PITIFUL SIGHT WAS THAT OF A SWEET LITTLE LASS—SUCH AS SIR JOHN MILLAIS WOULD HAVE LIKED TO PAINT—DANCING ON A PAIR OF BELLOWS FOR THREEPENCE A DAY."
(See page 230.)

maker at the forge, and to put 3*d.* a day into the pocket of her employer. As she danced her golden hair flew out, and the fiery sparks which showered upon her head reminded me of fire-flies seen at night near Florence, dancing over a field of ripe wheat. Indeed this misuser of children is the most reprehensible thing that offends in the Cradley district.

There are here factories where meagre little girls and boys (to whom the youngest Ginx could give points) are put to tasks, during their apprenticeship, against which a man would revolt. I have before me an object and a vision. The object is an indenture of apprenticeship; the vision is a thing seen at Cradley, in the very factory to which the indenture refers. The indenture has been before my lords in commission assembled, and traces of Norman fingers may be recognised in the grime which besmirches this wicked document.

It refers to a girl of fourteen, who is apprenticed by "these presents" to the art and trade of chain-making, at a wage of 2*s.* 6*d.* a week. The girl undertakes during

her apprenticeship neither to haunt taverns nor playhouses, nor to squander what



APPRENTICED TO THE ART AND TRADE OF CHAINMAKING.

remains of her wages, after paying for "sufficient meat, drink, medicine, clothing, lodging, and all other necessities," in

“playing at cards or dice tables, or any other unlawful games.”

The vision is of such a girl at work in this very factory. She was fourteen by the Factory Act, by paternity she was ten. I never saw such little arms, and her hands were made to cradle dolls. She was making links for chain-harrows, and as she worked the heavy Oliver she sang a song. And I also saw her owner approach with a clenched fist, and heard him say :

“I’ll give you some golden hair was hanging down her back! Why don’t you get on with your work?”

Next to her was a female wisp who was forging dog-chains, for which, with swivel and ring complete, she received $\frac{3}{4}d.$ (three farthings) apiece. It was the chain which sells currently for eighteenpence. She worked ten hours a day, and could “manage six chains in the day.” And from the conversation which I had with her, I do not think that she was at all the girl who would haunt playhouses and taverns, or squander her earnings at dice-tables, cards, or any such unlawful games.

The fogger flourishes in Cradley, no less than in Bromsgrove; with this difference, that in Cradley it is most often a woman who assumes the functions of the sweater. Mr. James Smith introduced me to an elderly lady, who keeps a shed in the neighbourhood of a very foul slum, and employs seven girls. She "has never forged a link of chain in her life, and gets a good living" out of the wretched women whom I saw at the forges on her premises.

Her system is a simple one. For every hundredweight of chain produced she receives 5s. 4*d.* For every hundredweight she pays 2s. 10*d.* The Union would admit 4s., for the Union allows 25 per cent. to the fogger. Anything over 25 per cent. is considered sweating. Two of the girls working in this shed were suckling babes and could work but slowly. Those who could work at their best, being unencumbered, could make a hundredweight of chain in two days and a half. Their owner walked serene and grey-haired amongst them, checking conversation, and, at times, abusive. She was but one of a numerous



THREE FARTHING'S APIECE.

"For forging these dog-chains, and attaching the swivels and rings, the girl receives three farthings apiece. They sell for eighteenpence. Working ten hours a day she can manage six chains in the day." (*See page 235.*)

class of human leeches fast to a gangrened sore.

Of Anvil Yard, with its open sewers and filth and shame, one would rather not write, nor of the haggard tatterdermalions who there groaned and jumped. In fact I hardly saw them. The name "Anvil Yard" had set me thinking of some lines of Goethe, in which he deplores the condition of the people — "zwischen dem Ambos und Hammer"—between the anvil and the hammer.

And as these lines went through my head, whilst before my spiritual eyes there passed the pale procession of the White Slaves of England, I could see nothing but sorrow and hunger and grime, rags, foul food, open sores and movements incessant, instinctive yet laborious—an anvil and a hammer ever descending—all vague, and in a mist as yet untinged with red, a spectacle so hideous that I gladly shut it out, wondering, for my part, what in these things is right.

NOTE.—I have to express to Mr. James Smith, the able Secretary of the Chainmakers' Union, my sincere thanks for his assistance during my visit to Cradley Heath.—R. H. S.

Appendix

"I do not hesitate to express the opinion that there is no hope of a large improvement of the condition of the greater part of the human family; if it is true that the increase of knowledge, the winning of a greater dominion over nature, which is its consequence, and the wealth which follows upon that dominion, are to make no difference in the extent and intensity of want, with its concomitant physical and moral degradation amongst the masses of the people, I would hail the advent of some kindly comet which would sweep the whole affair away as a desirable consummation."

PROFESSOR HUXLEY.

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The Chain Makers and Nail Makers

THE condition of the chain and nail makers is so well known, and the documents establishing this condition are so authoritative and so numerous, that it seems almost unnecessary to deal with these trades any further. I would accordingly have allowed my chapters on chain and nail makers to stand alone, an exposure of a lamentable state of things, had I not received a letter, printed in this appendix, from a prominent citizen in the Cradley Heath district, which indicates that some substantiation of my statements is required.

Now in glancing over the pages of the "REPORT as to the Condition of NAIL MAKERS and SMALL CHAIN MAKERS in *South Staffordshire* and *East Worcestershire* by the LABOUR CORRESPONDENT of the BOARD OF TRADE," and of the "REPORT of the SELECT COMMITTEE of the HOUSE OF LORDS on the SWEATING SYSTEM," I find not only substantiation but amplification. I append a few extracts from the Blue Book referred to.

130. With regard to the wages and hours which prevail in these trades, the evidence, though somewhat conflicting on points of detail, leads to certain very

definite conclusions. The facts brought out by the witnesses show that a hard week's work, averaging twelve hours a day for five days out of the week, provides no more than a bare subsistence for the men or women engaged in it. The Rev. H. Rylett, a minister in Dudley, acquainted with the district, stated that the women get from 4s. 6d. to 6s. 6d. a week. A man can make about three cwt. of chain in a week, for which he receives 5s. per cwt., so that he would earn about 15s. One of the work-women said that she could usually earn 5s. a week, or something like that, out of which she had to pay 1s. for firing. Another stated that, working from seven in the morning till seven at night, she could make about a cwt. of chain in a week, for which she was paid from 4s. to 6s. 6d., the price varying. "We do not live very well," she said; "our most living is bacon; we get a bit of butter sometimes." A girl of the age of eighteen stated that she worked twelve hours a day, and that her net earnings would be about 7s. 1d. Sometimes she had bacon for her dinner; never fresh meat. She gave the weight of the hammer which she used at from 7 to 8 lbs., but this was subsequently proved to be a mistake. The average weight does not exceed 3 lbs. It may here be mentioned that the price of a dog chain which is made by these women for three-farthings is, in London, from 1s. to 1s. 3d. The value of the materials would be about 2d. A still more extraordinary case is that mentioned by Mr. Juggins, who stated that cart chains, costing, as far as value of labour and material were concerned, 1½d. and 7d. respectively, had sold in Southport for from 4s. 6d. to 5s., in Liverpool for 5s., and in London for 7s. A male chain maker stated that he earned 14s. or 15s. a week, working from seven till seven, except on Mondays, when he finished at six, and on Saturdays at three. A nail-maker said that out of his week's work only about 8s. 6d. remained for himself, after deducting firing and other charges; "and I have worked for that amount of

money," he added, "till I did not know where to put myself." The following case appears fairly representative. The husband and wife work together, and there are three children, two at school and none at work. The man does the "heading," the woman the "pointing" of the nails. Their united work brings in from 18s. to £1 a week; out of that about 2s. 3d. for "breeze," about 5s. for carriage, 2s. 6d. for rent of house and shop, schooling of the children, 6d., 6d. to 9d. for deductions on account of under weight, and the man has to devote from a day to half a day to repairing his tools. Eighteen shillings or £1 does not represent their average weekly earnings over a year, as some weeks they do not get any work at all. Their general hours of work were from seven in the morning till nine at night, with half an hour for breakfast, an hour for dinner, and half an hour for tea for the man. The witness herself had no time, "on account of there being no one in the house to do the work besides myself." The hands employed in factories are better paid, the cases which we have cited being taken from the persons who work in their own homes. Mr. George Green, a member of a firm of nail and chain makers, carrying on business near Dudley, stated that the average wages per week, taken from the books of his firm, running over four weeks, were, "for women, 8s. 2d.; young women, 9s. 4d.; youths, 12s. 7d.; less 12½ per cent., which would be about the cost of their breeze and the rent of their workshop." Referring to men's wages, Mr. Green said he paid by the "list," and that they were getting "on an average 26s. 11d. net"; but in 1888 he thought they would only have been earning "about 22s." These were the wages paid for special quality of work and for superior labour. In the case of the men, thirteen in number, employed on the premises, these amounts represented individual earnings, but as out-workers employ help, the 26s. 11d., in the majority of cases, must be considered as representing the wages of

more than one person. With regard to the half-inch, or common chain, the men would only get 24s. 6d. per week. Out of that sum, Mr. Green said, "you will have to deduct 25 per cent.," leaving the net earnings 18s. 4½d. Upon the whole, we see no reason to doubt the accuracy of the representations made to us by the workers themselves.

As to "Oliver":

134. The work of cutting cold iron by means of the "oliver" falls with great severity on the women who are employed at it, and it appears to us that it ought to be discontinued so far as they are concerned. The oliver is a heavy sledge-hammer, worked with a treadle by means of a spring, and when used for cutting cold iron it is totally unsuited for women. Mr. Kerr said: "I have found among women, especially those that have been working at heavy work, that they are very liable to misplacements of the womb, and to rupture; and also among married women I find that they are very liable to miscarriages, as they frequently go on working when they are in the family way." He believed that women ought not to be allowed to use it at all, and we fully agree with him. It is the out-workers who suffer, not the women in the regular factories. In every respect it is the former class which requires protection; but, as the factory inspectors and other witnesses have shown, they are not willing to be interfered with, fearing a diminution of their opportunity or power to earn the miserable livelihood which, at the best, is at their command.

"Oliver"—and an oliver weighing 36 pounds at that—is still in use in Cradley Heath, although this Committee printed the following recommendation in 1890:—

200. Evidence has been brought before us proving

that the use of the "oliver," or heavy sledge-hammer, used for cutting cold iron, is unfit work for women or girls, with the exception of the "light oliver," adapted for making hobnails; and we recommend that women and girls should be prohibited by law from working the "oliver" when the hammer exceeds a certain specified weight.

My readers will remember my conversation with a woman who had miscarried at every confinement.

The oliver is often so heavy and so much beyond the powers of the frail female being who is yoked to it, that but for the assistance of her children, or of a willing friend, she would be unable to work at all. I saw many women, with three or four little brats each "helping mother," by throwing their weight on to the treadle when the hammer had to be brought down.

The Report deals at length with the malpractices of the fogger, who is fatter and more foggerish than ever to-day, and laments the manner in which the Truck Act and the Factory Acts are set at nought and the Factory Inspectors are deceived and evaded, and to its pages the reader who is desirous of more information is referred. I will conclude with a quotation from paragraph 134, which is more pitiful than anything I can remember to have read.

The mortality among children is great; more than half the total deaths. But this must doubtless be ascribed in part to the early marriages and unhealthy parentage. It is "a common thing" for girls and boys to marry at fifteen or sixteen, and then the parents are living all the time close to starvation. The sorrowful state of their lives is sharply depicted in the statement

of one of the witnesses just quoted: "She (the mother) does not get proper attention, but very often gets injury for life from the way she lies in; her children are only a nuisance in the house, and if a child dies, it is, 'Thank God it has gone back again'; if the child survives, it is insufficiently fed, and dies, in a vast number of instances, before it reaches one year."

Aye, indeed, well may the mother thank God.

Letter from a Gentleman at Cradley Heath

9th October, 1896.

SIR,—

I have read with much interest your various articles in *Pearson's* on "The White Slaves of England"; and as one who takes some interest in social matters, I have looked forward with expectation to your article on "The Chain-makers of Cradley Heath." It has been my lot for the last six or seven years to live in the immediate vicinity of Cradley Heath. And as a medical man, practising chiefly amongst the working people, I have been brought into intimate daily (and too frequently nightly) contact with the people, and think I can claim to know something of their habits and surroundings. I am somewhat democratic in my opinions, and in trade disputes my bias and sympathies are as a rule entirely with the employees; yet your description of the chain-makers as a downtrodden, half-starved, and slave-driven class, comes as a revelation to me; and as a revelation which my personal knowledge forbids me to accept, and compels me to suspect (whilst admitting your personal conviction and excellent intentions in the matter) that some of your informants have been "having you on."

I know something of Bromsgrove and the nail trade generally, and admit that the nail-makers there and elsewhere are a poverty-stricken lot, for nail-making is a decaying industry; and had it not been for the allotments, which have made them fairly prosperous,

the Bromsgrove nail-makers fairly merited the name of slaves. I do, however, maintain that the chain-makers as a rule are a fairly well paid class, and that their lot contrasts favourably with that of many other classes of operatives.

I have read part of your article over to two or three practical chain-makers—men and women—and they have laughed and remarked, "Oh, no doubt there are such as he describes, but they mostly bring it on themselves." They also draw attention to the fact that your lady informants appeared to be chiefly frequenters of the "Manchester," and surmised that no doubt you paid for a quart or two for them, and that they were not very accurate as to the "copy" which they gave in return.

Of course, in every industry and in every community there are many who are poor and badly paid, and a bad workman or workwoman in the chain trade, as in any other, has an inferior remuneration, although an equal appetite, to his or her more skilful companion. The general idea I gather from your article is that you take unusual and exceptional cases of hardship, and give the reader the impression that this is the general condition prevailing. I know too well, that although Cradley Heath contains a great many contented and industrious workers, it also contains a large number of idle and slatternly people—the class of women who spend the week's earnings on Saturday night, who have beefsteak breakfasts on Sunday, and who do not commence work again till Tuesday or Wednesday, and who then make up for lost time by starving all the rest of the week.

To compare the condition of the chain-makers with that of Dorsetshire labourers, or Bermondsey dock hands, would be most unfair to the latter, and I have lived amongst both these classes.

It is well to remember that the total income of a family here is considerably above the average in most

parts of the country, where the family is dependent on the father's work, with that of boys old enough to work; here the mother and daughters contribute to the sum total, and their contribution is additional to the father's income, which elsewhere has to suffice for the needs of the family.

I have often known mothers and daughters go into the chain shop only when they wanted a new bonnet, or to save up a little money for a "good time"—that is, an outing on a Bank Holiday. You would be surprised to know how many chain-makers are the owners of their own houses; how many of them are able to go to Blackpool for a week in the summer; how many of them have good round sums (hundreds of pounds) in the bank. Whilst others, who have had equal opportunities perhaps, exhibit all the signs of destitution, except in their weekly beer account. Go to Cradley Heath on a Bank Holiday, or at the Annual Wake, and the evidences of poverty will be in abeyance. Few there are who cannot afford an outing, and few who do not take a *week's* holiday whenever a Bank Holiday comes round.

There would seem to be two classes in the district: one which exhibits a thrift comparable to that of the French peasantry; and another, with the same opportunities, who live from hand to mouth.

More here than elsewhere, I think it is impossible to estimate a man's financial position from his surroundings. I have known a man with hundreds whose appearance suggested destitution. I have known people with thousands who lived simply in a four-roomed cottage, and did not aspire beyond the social position of their fathers. So much for generalities. Now a few remarks on particular statements in the Article:—

Re *Becr.* "Threepenny" is quite unknown. "Fourpenny" is the usual beer drunk. A great number of the people brew their own beer (their rental allowing them to do so without licence).

Re Big Chain-makers' Wages. A cable chain-maker can get £1 a day, of which 12s. goes to himself and 8s. to his striker. Plenty of men do such work four or five days a week. Many after a day or two's work won't work any more that week, but drink for the rest of the week.

Re Unhealthiness of Work. "Few old men in Cradley." "Lung Diseases carry men off at early age."

This is most surely incorrect. Consumption is most notoriously rare in this district. All local medical men are agreed that few places in England enjoy such an exemption from Phthisis. Bronchitis and Pneumonia are not more common than elsewhere. Apart from the high infant mortality, which it shares with all industrial centres, and the prevalence of Zymotic Disease, the district and people are very healthy, and the death rate by no means high.

Lucina not a kindly Goddess. Quite true. Confinements as a rule difficult. I have attended many hundreds in this district, *but* none of my worst cases were amongst chain-makers. They are strong, muscular women, and generally have good times, as exemplified by rapid birth of "Little Johnny." Early marriages probably account for Lucina's unfriendliness.

Females swinging heavy hammers. Women are only allowed to make small chain, for which heavy hammers are unsuitable.

3d. a day for blowing bellows. 3s. 6d. is the recognised wage a boy or girl has weekly for blowing. Stringent government regulations prevent children working long hours. Chain-makers tell me that they never heard of a blower working for 3d. a day. So the case must be quite an exceptional one, and yet it is quoted as a usual thing.

Sorrow and hunger, grime, rags, foul food, etc., etc. The chain-makers as a rule, barring exceptional cases, are a *well-fed* (when not at work, *e.g.* Sundays), well-clothed, and certainly a happy people.

Re *Illustrations*.—The third illustration, supposed to represent a female spike-maker, unfortunately does not really do so. The woman is obviously making “hammer-chain.”

The fifth illustration represents a girl “blowing,” with bare feet. I have been in hundreds of chain-shops, but never saw any one working with bare feet.

The year before last was a period of *exceptional* distress in Cradley Heath, owing to the closure of the New British Iron Company’s Works; but that is now recovered from, and Cradley Heath seems to be entering upon a period of prosperity.

Whether women should do such work at all is a perfectly legitimate question for debate. For my own part, when I came to the district I had a strong prejudice against women blacksmiths, but further acquaintance with the subject makes me think they might do worse. For young *unmarried* women the work is not unsuitable under present conditions as to hours and class of work. It is *certainly* healthy work. Much more so than dress-making, tailoring, book-binding, etc. Anæmia and chlorosis is not very common amongst chain-makers. The work does not unsex the women. As a class they are much superior to factory girls generally, and especially to “brick-kiln wenches,” and such like.

What it seems to me is required is greater combination amongst the operatives themselves. When a strike for a higher list price takes place, there are always so many blacklegs who work at the lower price. All are agreed that the conditions under which women and children work are much better than formerly, but to improve their position there must be a stronger trades combination than prevails at present.

Finally, in my opinion much of the poverty and distress that prevails is due (after drink) to the unjust and iniquitous manner in which the poor law and especially *out-door relief* is administered to aged people, and not to any peculiar slave-driving in the chain trade.

Most pitiable of all is the break up of Friendly Societies when the members get old, and thus provision for old age is lost.

This, however, will not prevail so much in the future, for Foresters Courts are now so constituted that one supports another.

I have met, of course, with many cases of poverty and distress, sometimes from want of work, sometimes from inability to work, frequently from bad administration of a bad system of Poor Law Relief; but such poverty is incidental to all working communities, and in no way peculiar to the chain-trade.

In writing thus, I feel that I lay myself open to the charge of intrusion, and my gratuitous criticisms may find a fitting resting-place behind the fire; but nevertheless, no cause can benefit by the most unintentional exaggeration, and to describe the experience of women workers here as one of "chronic hunger" can only provoke an incredulous smile even amongst the chain-makers themselves.

Day and night for some years I have spent my life amongst chain-makers, and am bound to affirm that although there are exceptionable cases of distress and hardship, such are rather the exception than the rule.

Trusting that you, as a well-wisher to the "horny handed," will receive these remarks from a fellow well-wisher in the spirit in which they are written.

I beg to remain,

Yours faithfully,

X. Y.

Conclusion

THE Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System brought its Report to a close with the following paragraph.

204. We cannot conclude without expressing our earnest hope that the exposure of the evils which have been brought to our notice will induce capitalists to pay closer attention to the conditions under which the labour which supplies them with goods is conducted. When legislation has reached the limit up to which it is effective, the real amelioration of conditions must be due to increased sense of responsibility in the employer and improved habits in the employed. We have reason to think that the present inquiry itself has not been without moral effect. And we believe that public attention and public judgment can effectually check operations in which little regard is shown to the welfare of workpeople, and to the quality of production, and can also strongly second the zealous and judicious efforts now being made to encourage thrift, promote temperance, improve dwellings, and raise the tone of living.

These noble words were written on April 28th, 1890. We are now in March, 1897, and matters are to-day even worse than they were seven years ago. Such, at least, is the opinion I have formed by my investigations. And seven years hence, matters will be still worse unless other

remedies are found, than appeals to the stony heart of Capital.

It is a pity that this should be so.

END OF APPENDIX.